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MEDIA RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW LAW CHANGES TRAFFIC CITATION TRIAL DATE PROCEDURE

The Westminster Police Department is reminding motorists that if they receive a traffic citation **on or after January 1, 2011**, a new law requires the driver to request a trial date if they want one, instead of a trial date being automatically assigned.

The new law gives drivers who receive a traffic citation three options:

- 1-Pay the full amount of the preset fine;
- 2-Request a hearing regarding sentencing and disposition in lieu of a trial, (meaning you do not dispute the facts as indicated in the citation, but you wish to be heard regarding sentencing); or
- 3-Request a trial date at the date, time and place established by the District Court.

The law requires that a person who receives a citation make one of these three choices and notify the District Court within 30 days of receipt of the citation. If not, the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration will be notified and may take action to suspend the person's driver's license.

Previously, persons issued a citation were automatically given a trial date. The old law required them to either pay the fine by the trial date, or appear in court on that day to answer to the charge. Often, people waited until the day before, or even the day of trial to pay the fine. This meant the police officer who issued the citation was already scheduled to appear in court and it was too late to notify him or her that they were not needed to appear. This created scheduling difficulties for police officers and often incurred overtime expenditures for police departments required to have police officers present in court, even though they were not needed.

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House Bill 829 and Senate Bill 560 were passed in the 2010 Maryland General Assembly Session and will become law on January 1, 2011. Supporters of the new law believe this will increase efficiency in both the courts and police departments across Maryland.

Police agencies believe the new law will eliminate needless trips to court and supervisors will be better able to schedule the deployment of personnel. Commanders believe there will be an overall cost savings to the Department in overtime pay. They also believe the new procedure will keep officers on patrol that would otherwise be in court waiting for a case in which they ultimately were not needed.

The new law does not apply to citations issued for 'Must Appear' violations, such as DUI. Persons receiving citations for 'Must Appear' offenses will be automatically notified by the courts of a trial date and location where they must appear.

Information about the new procedure will be printed on citations given to motorists. Officers will be reminding motorists of the new procedure when citations are issued. Persons with questions can also visit the District Court of Maryland website at www.mdcourts.gov/district, or call 1-800-492-2656.

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